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Western Visual Representations of Dervishes from the 14th Century to Early 20th

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In this paper, I would like to investigate the way the Europeans have drawn and painted, and then photographed the “dervish,” that is, the most common word to designate the Muslim mystic or Sufi in the Ottoman Empire. In Europe, the figure of the dervish is emblematic of the Muslim East, and it is frequently considered as embodying not only mysticism but also religious fanaticism or “oriental despotism.” This word appears for instance in the writings of renowned French authors like Molière, Montesquieu, Voltaire and Victor Hugo. Similarly, in the visual sources, as engravings, paintings and drawings, the image of the dervish is, at least since the 14th century, an image which has fascinated and even haunted artists, writers, engravers, painters and even photographers.

The dervish: from pictures and paintings to photographs

The first travelogues published by Westerners who visited the Ottoman Empire gave a notable place to the dervishes, and especially to those who used to perform amazing unexpected rituals and ascetic practices, as expressed by those who have been surprised by them.¹ The term “dervish” appeared for the first time in the book dedicated to the Ottoman Empire by the traveller Georges of Hungary, in 1481, under the form: « *dermschler / durmishlar* ».² The word has a Persian origin (*drigū, driyosh, daryosh*) and refers, in the Zoroastrian culture before the emergence of Islam, on one hand, to a poor and impoverished man, and, on the other hand, to a man searching for a moral realisation.³ The original meaning of this term was not lost with the collapse of Zoroastrianism and the emergence of Islam; but it has become more ascetic and mystical.

Several chapters of Georges of Hungary’s book are dedicated to the Muslim mystics, particularly to the wandering and unmarried monks called “qalandars,” and also to the dance of the whirling dervishes, and to the mystic Hatschi Pettesh, actually Hacı Bektaş, the saint patron of the Bektashis, a Sufi brotherhood very popular among the Ottomans with a close link to the Janissaries. Georges of Hungary’s indications are quite interesting,

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1 On these travelogues see James Mather, *Pashas, Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2009).

2 Klaus Kreiser, “Die Derwische im Spiegel abend-ländischer Reiseberichte,” in Klaus Kreiser, *Istanbul und das osmanische Reich. Derwischwesen, Baugeschichte, Inschriftenkunde* (Istanbul: Isis Verlag, 1995, p. 2).

3 See Mansur Shaki, “Darvîş,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 1996), vol. VII, pp. 72-73.

but unfortunately fragmented and lacking any images.⁴ It is only in the second half of the 16th century that the dervishes were pictured in travelogues about the Ottoman Empire. The oldest pictures, dated 1555, come from the *Quatre Premiers Livres des Navigations et pérégrinations orientales* of Nicolas de Nicolay, printed in Paris, in 1568.⁵ Nicolas de Nicolay had visited Turkey from 1551 to 1552. It is striking that Nicolas and all the travellers who came after him were not interested in all of the dervishes of the Empire, who were divided into several brotherhoods, but only in those who lived in a quite marginal way, wearing and bearing unusual and spectacular clothes and symbolic artifacts. First of all, the painters and illustrators pictured the wandering and begging dervishes. Later, from the 17th century, the dance of the whirling dervishes at Constantinople started to fascinate the Western artists and their audiences. Finally, since the 19th century, the howling and the whirling dervishes of Constantinople have constituted the most attractive exhibition any new visitor to this city would want desperately to see.

The visual representations of the dervishes are of several kinds. Sometimes, they are unreliable images, though unintentionally, because the Western designer or painter was very badly informed about Sufism and the Sufi orders, and on the life of the dervishes. But, in some other cases, the images are precise and reliable, as if they were photographs. In this last case, the images must be considered as “ethnographic pictures.” Besides, another point to be mentioned is that the Westerners didn’t observe the dervishes, as the Eastern miniaturists and the Turkish or Persian designers have done; the Western artist wanted usually to picture some details of the dervish life or clothing which had never drawn the attention of the Eastern artist, more precisely that were never represented by the Muslims. This is the case for example of the ceremonials and rituals of the Sufi brotherhoods which were drawn in detail by a European engraver in 18th century.

As mentioned above, the first images of the dervishes were published in Nicolay de Nicolay’s book in 1577, and in several other books in the 16th and 17th centuries. Also worthy of mention is the book of the Christian missionary Eugène Roger written in 1646 which deals exclusively with bands of non-conformist and antinomian mystics⁶ among whom few would qualify as dervishes or Sufis.⁷ These bands were known actually under many varied names, *torlaqi*, *jemali*, *edhemi*, *qalandar*, etc. Some of them disappeared in the

4 See *Tractatus de Moribus, conditionibus et nequitia Turcorum*; Georges de Hongrie, *Des Turcs. Traité sur les mœurs, les coutumes et la perfidie des Turcs*, translated in French from latin by Joël Schnapp (Toulouse : Anarcharsis, 2003), p. 123. On the term “Dervish” in Islam see Hamid Algar, “Darvīš,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1996, vol. VII, pp. 73–76, and Alexandre Papas, “Dervish,” *Encyclopedia of Islam* 3 (2012): pp. 129–135.

5 (Lyon: Guillaume Rouillé).

6 Dervishes who are against the law (*nomos* in old Greek) of Islam.

7 Eugène Roger, *La Terre sainte ou description topographique tres-particuliere des Saints-Lieux et de la terre de promission* (Paris: chez Antoine Bertier, 1646).

following centuries and only the term “qalandar” has continued to be used. Besides, another author, Ricaut, the British ambassador in the Ottoman Empire, gives a description, in 1668, of almost all the Sufi brotherhoods without any exception: Naqshbandi (Ebrbuhari of Abu Bakr), Nimetulahi, Mevlevi, Chalveti (Halveti), Kadri (Kadiri), Kalenderi, Edhemi, Bektasses (Bektashi), Herevis/Hizrevi, etc. And contrary to Nicolay, the text of Ricaud is accompanied by two drawings which show some dervishes who are neither wandering nor non-conformist, but orthodox dervishes.⁸

The non-conformist and antinomian dervishes were wandering and ascetic mystics who frequently opposed the political and religious law, and the religious and social politic of the sultan. These dervishes travelled in bands, lived half-naked, wore animal-skins (feline, panther) and begged food and money from the people. They said prayers and chanted mystical songs for the people, accompanied by the sound of percussion instruments, drums and cymbals. They performed ascetic practices such as self-laceration, piercing their own body with swords or iron. Nicolay de Nicolay writes for instance that these dervishes “wear a big and heavy iron ring on their genitals in order to prevent them from having sex with anyone.”⁹ This particular point is pictured in Nicolay’s book, but was never represented by the Eastern miniaturists who avoided representing the sexual organs (Figure 1).

Since the time of Clavijo, many travellers have regarded the antinomian dervishes as “Muslim monks.” Ricaut writes for example that “nobody denies that the religion of the Turks is a bizarre mix of those of the Christians and the Jews, and that the monasteries of the Turks were built on the model of those of the former.”¹⁰ Similarly, the Turks have also regarded the Christian religious as a kind of dervish. This fact is illustrated by a Western writer who wrote in the 18th century that “the clothing of the dervishes is similar to that of the Capuchin [a religious order within the Catholic Church],”



Figure 1: Turkish qalandar : from Nicolas de Nicolay, *Les navigations, pérégrinations et voyages faicts en la Turquie par Nicolas de Nicolay* (Anvers: 1626).

⁸ *Histoire de l'état présent de l'Empire ottoman*, translated from the original in English published in 1668 (Amsterdam : chez Abraham Wolfgang, 1670), pp. 334–363.

⁹ Nicolas de Nicolay, *Les navigations, pérégrinations et voyages faicts en la Turquie par Nicolas de Nicolay* (Anvers: 1626), p. 182.

¹⁰ *Histoire de l'état présent de l'Empire ottoman*, p. 334.

and that consequently “the members [of this Catholic order] don’t need to disguise themselves in these countries, because the similarity of their clothing to that of the Abdal and of the dervishes, brings them the respect and consideration of the population.”¹¹

The oldest description of these ascetic dervishes was probably made by the Spanish Ambassador Clavijo who met them in Azerbaijan in 1403–04, and wrote: “these priests live as hermits; they are half-naked, their hair and beards are trimmed, and they heal the sick chanting hymns accompanied by a tambourine.”¹² Georges de Hongrie gave a more detailed report of these dervishes in 1481, and writes that each wore “a particular sign to refer to his ascetic exercise”; the feather means for instance that the dervish practices meditation, the clothing made by sewing together pieces of material of different colors means poverty, etc.¹³ One century later, the images have brought more detail about this symbolic clothing and paraphernalia. It is worthy to note for example that the headgear of these dervishes was not turbans but closer to the cap used in Central Asia, that is usually composed of folds. Also they carried knotty sticks (similar to that of the stick / *asa* of Moses) decorated with symbols, a begging bowl made from a coconut, a carved stone fixed to the belt, and a conch (a big shell) used as a horn, etc. (according to the pictures published by Roger and Ricaut, 18th century) (Figure 2). It must be mentioned, however, that one of these Western observers has pictured something that was neither indicated, nor drawn in the eastern sources: i.e. a long stick with a horse head at the top (Figure 3).¹⁴ This symbol is certainly of shamanic origin since the dervish who carried it is a Qalandar, a Sufi order



Figure 2: Dervish with the stick (*asa*) of Moses: from Eugène Roger, *La Terre sainte ou description topographique tres-particuliere des Saints-Lieux et de la terre de promission* (Paris: chez Antoine Bertier, 1646).

11 *Mémoires géographiques, physiques et historiques sur l’Afrique, l’Asie et l’Amérique par l’Auteur des mélanges intéressants et curieux* (Yverdon: 1767), vol. 4, p. 71.

12 The word “Priest” here is the translation of *caxic* in the Spanish text, that is a deformation of the Persian word *keshtish* (Christian priest, monk). The English translation was made by Guy Le Strange, *Clavijo Embassy to Tamerlane 1403–1406*, from a printed version in Spanish dated 1582, London, Routledge, 1928, pp. 139–240.

13 *Des Turcs. Traité sur les mœurs, les coutumes et la perfidie des Turcs*, pp. 117–118. About these dervishes see also Nicolay, *Les navigations, pèrègrinations et voyages faicts en la Turquie*, pp. 185–194.

14 This image is in Paul Rycaut’s book, *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: 1686). On the Sufi paraphernalia in Turkey, see F. De Jong, “The iconography of Bektashism: A survey of themes and symbolism in clerical costume, liturgical objects and pictorial art,” in *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4 (1989): pp. 7–29; Resul Ay, *Anadolu’da Derviş ve Toplum, 13–15 Yüzyıllar* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2008), pp. 35–43.

very close to the Islamised shamans of Central Asia. More, in Siberian shamanism, the shamans use a very similar stick with the head of a horse at the top.¹⁵

These antinomian and ascetic Muslims were the only ones to be represented by European artists, at least until the 17th century. However, from the end of this century, a few pictures exist of whirling dervishes (*mevlevi*) and of other dervishes linked to more orthodox orders. The travellers have also well understood that these wandering dervishes were far from being respectful of the obligations of Islam, and that they were condemned as “heretics” by the ulama. The great majority of these pictures made by Western artists are reliable and reflect the descriptions that have appeared in Ottoman sources and Eastern miniatures.¹⁶

In the 17th century, following the disappearance of the Qalandar bands and the emergence of strong Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire, the descriptions of the dervishes and their visual representations became more precise. Also, at this time, it was not only the antinomian groups that attracted the interest of Western painters, but all of the Sufi orders. This turning point is represented by a book published in 1788 by Muraga D’Ohsson, a Catholic Armenian of Istanbul: the *Tableau général de l’Empire ottoman*. The long chapter in this book which deals with the Sufi orders is illustrated by wonderful pictures made by the Greek-Ottoman court artist Constantine Kapidagi (or Konstantinus Kyzikos).¹⁷ Kapidagi’s series of full-length portraits of the dervishes of almost all the orders of the Ottoman Empire is of major interest, especially because it shows Sufi orders who had never before been painted or drawn (Kadirî, Halvetî, etc.) (Figure 4). Investigating these portraits, we can understand the reasons why painters and illustrators had



Figure 3: “A sort of dervish that travails the world”: from Ricaud, *Histoire de l’état présent de l’Empire ottoman*, translated from the original in English published in 1668 (Amsterdam : chez Abraham Wolfgank, 1670)

¹⁵ See Laurence Delaby, “A propos des cannes chevalines du Musée de l’Homme,” *Etudes mongole et sibérienne* 28 (1997): pp. 27–54.

¹⁶ Cf. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Kalenderiler* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1992), pp. 103–120 ; Ahmed Karamustafa, *God’s unruly friends. Dervish groups in the Islamic middle period 1200–1550* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994), pp. 65–84.

¹⁷ See Günsel Renda, “Illustrating the Tableau Général de l’Empire Othoman,” in *The Torch of the Empire. Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson and the Tableau Général of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth century*, Istanbul, Yapıkredi, 2002, pp. 65–66, 72.

no interest in general in the conformist/orthodox Sufi orders. It was actually because the clothing of these Sufis had neither unique features, nor was it attractive. Such orthodox Sufis generally wore a large overcoat and a turban of some sort and didn't bear any mysterious paraphernalia, unlike the whirling dervishes, the Bektashis and the Qalandars. In brief, the appearance of Orthodox Sufi orders was not amazing for artists or for their public. Nevertheless, d'Ohsson decided to include visual representations of the members due to the scientific character of his book.

The second particularity d'Ohsson's book is that it provides very detailed pictures, actually "ethnologic drawings," of several rituals performed by different Sufi orders. Such drawings had never been made in the past. The author of many of them was also Constantine Kapidagi who, as a court painter, had access to the religious ceremonies (with the exception of the ritual of the Rifai order which is from another local but

unknown artist, certainly from Kapidagi's circle).¹⁸ These drawings show the "dance in chain" (*halka*), i.e. performed hand-in-hand in a circle, of the Kadiris and Halvetis, very different from the spinning of the Mevlevi; the ritual of piercing of the Rifai and Kadiri, the assemblies of vocal *dhikr* and the mingling of whirling dance and dance in chain, that is quite rare (Figure 5).¹⁹ These



Figure 4: « Cerrâhî-dervish » : from Baron Ignatius Muradgea d'Ohsson, *Tableau général de l'Empire othoman, divisé en deux parties, dont l'une comprend la législation mahométane, l'autre, l'histoire de l'Empire othoman* (Paris: Imprimerie de Monsieur, 1791).

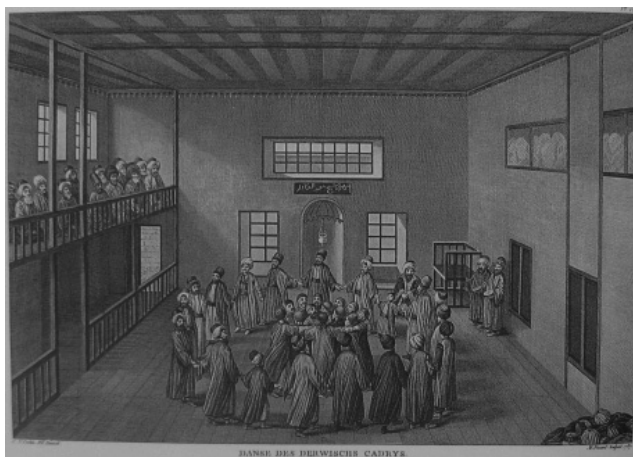


Figure 5: "Danse des derwischs cadrys" (dance of the Kadiri dervishes); from Baron Ignatius Muradgea d'Ohsson, *Tableau général de l'Empire othoman*, vol. 2, plate 127, facing p. 302.

¹⁸ G. Renda, "Illustrating the Tableau Général de l'Empire Othoman," p. 72.

¹⁹ Baron Ignatius Muradgea d'Ohsson, *Tableau général de l'Empire othoman, divisé en deux parties, dont l'une comprend la législation mahométane, l'autre, l'histoire de l'Empire othoman* (Paris: Imprimerie de Monsieur, 1791), 4 vols.

engravings are indeed of the greatest interest for the historians and the anthropologists who investigate the Sufi orders and the religious rituals because there are very few equivalents of these pictures in the East, with the exception of the miniatures of the dance of the Mevlevis.

The “orientalist fever” and the beginning of the “oriental tour,” in 1820–1830 — that is the travel of writers and artists to the East in quest of a new estheticism, of constant light and color —, following by the introduction in the Ottoman Empire of photography in 1839, influenced the depiction of the dervish.²⁰ The figure depicted at this time embodied more and more of the occult and the beauty, and also the horror. The photographers were quickly fascinated by the dervishes, as the painters had been at first.²¹ At this time, Victor Hugo wrote the *Orientales*, with one chapter in this book entitled “Derviche.”²² The word “dervish” became very popular and portraits of dervishes have appeared in photographic books on the Ottoman Empire, as in journals, magazines, and in the first travel guides of Turkey.²³ No wonder then that the photographers were drawn by the same subjects that had attracted the illustrators of the beginning of the 19th century: i.e. the whirling and howling dervishes, the non-conformist Sufis, the Qalandars and the wandering Sufis.

The photographers however have worked in different ways. Some were more attracted by doing realistic pictures and providing illustrations for the travelogues and for the studies of the first researchers. In these cases, the photographers have endeavoured to display the day-to-day lives of the dervishes or to report about some major event of their religious, social and political lives. Meanwhile, after 1840, some photographers opened photographic studios in Istanbul and among their customers there were Sufi shaykhs

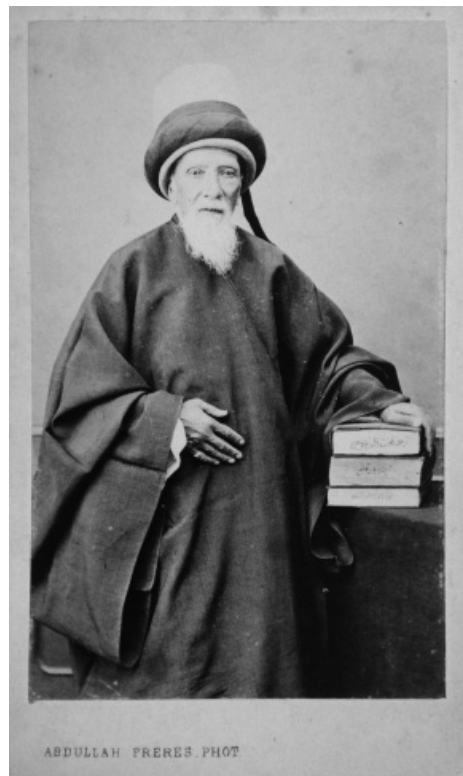


Figure 6: Kudretullah, melevi shaykh of the Pera Lodge: photograph by Abdullah Frères, end of the 19th century.

20 See Isabelle Daunais, *L'Art de la mesure ou l'invention de l'espace dans les récits d'Orient* (Saint Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1996), pp. 15–24.

21 See Nancy Micklewright, “Dervish Images in Photographs and Paintings,” in Raymond Lifchez, ed. *The Dervish Lodge. Architecture, Art and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey* (Berkeley: University of California Press), pp. 269–283.

22 Victor Hugo, *Les Orientales* (Paris: Charles Gosselin, 1829), vol 3, pp. 151–156. See Georges Thouvenin, “Le ‘Derviche des Orientales’. Les sources de Victor Hugo,” *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 37 (3 trimestre 1930): pp. 347–367.

23 See for example, Adolphe Joanne et Emile Isambert, *Itinéraire descriptif, historique et archéologique de l'Orient* (Paris: Hachette, 1861), p. 352.

coming for portraits of themselves, alone or with their family, and also of all the members of the lodge. In this last case, the pictures were usually taken in their *tekke* (Figure 6).²⁴ Thanks to the invention of photography, the images of Sufis spread gradually in both the East and the West, and especially in the later where many people were curious about the dervishes and also desirous to travel to Turkey. This spread was made possible by journals, magazines, and, first and foremost, through postcards in the beginning of the 20th century.

It would be an error to think that photography was fully respectful toward the reality, at least more than engravings and paintings. On the contrary, photography can sometimes trick its viewers with subtlety and persuasion. Several photographs of Sufis in the Ottoman Empire were indeed photomontages; the aim was for example to gather in one photograph the whole of the symbolic paraphernalia borne by a dervish, to please the eyes of the European public. In this case, confusion is encouraged, as it is well illustrated in several postcards. Some postcards, for instance, are based on a photograph of the same dervish with different names; some others mix the paraphernalia of more than one Sufi order (Kalenderi, Bektachi, and Rifai), all appearing to be borne by the same dervish (Figure 7). We wonder finally if the man in these photographs is a real dervish or not; there is a great likelihood that he is not. Besides, famous Western illustrated magazine and journals — like the *Tour du monde*, the *Magasin pittoresque*, and the *Illustration*²⁵ — have circulated the image of the dervish on a large scale, and made this image popular with a great number of European readers. These illustrations, unfortunately, are generally unreliable and eccentric, though a few do reflect the reality.



Figure 7: Postcard “le marcheur oriental”; private collection Th. Zarcone.

Sufi brotherhoods and “haunting” images

There are three groups of dervishes which have fascinated first travellers and Western readers, and then tourists and scholars: the first group is composed of the wandering dervishes, mostly qalandars, who would usually come to the Ottoman Empire from Central Asia and India.

²⁴ See Catherine Pinget, *Istanbul, photographes et sultans, 1840–1900* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2011), pp. 47–48, and especially pp. 111–116.

²⁵ “Derviches tourneurs,” *Magasin pittoresque* (1839): pp. 70–73; “Les Derviches hurleurs,” *Magasin pittoresque* (1883).

These dervishes used to stop for some days or months in Istanbul on their way to Jerusalem and Mecca (Figure 8). They would beg for their food, dance and chant in the streets of the great Muslim cities. They were recognizable by their conical hats, alms bowls, and knotted staffs. Representations of them made by painters and photograph exist in many places in the Muslim world: Istanbul, Jerusalem and Mecca. In addition, this Sufi image was particularly appreciated by the postcard makers.

The whirling dervishes

The two other groups are those of the whirling and howling dervishes. Watching the ceremonies of these orders at Constantinople was, since the 18th century, an inescapable attraction for foreign travellers. Two lodges belonging to these orders existed in the city. A French journalist indicated in an article dedicated to the whirling dervishes, in the *Magasin pittoresque* in 1839, that “the whirling and howling dervishes were the strangest Sufi orders because of their ascetic exercises, and that as indicated by their names, the former danced and the later howled.”²⁶ In brief, the interest of the Westerners in the performances of these dervishes comes from the fact that they appreciated the beauty of the dances of the first order, while being horrified by the howling of the second.

I don’t want to enter here into an analysis of the rituals of these two Sufi orders, but to focus only on the interpretation of these rituals by Western observers, and on the way illustrators have pictured them.²⁷

Arriving in Istanbul, the travellers used to immediately rush to the lodge of the whirling dervishes at Pera, in the former Western district of the city, close to the foreign embassies. Erected in 1491, this famous *mevlevihane* (house of the whirling dervishes) worked without interruption up until 1925. The oldest Western description of the ritual of the whirling dervishes can be read in Georges de Hongrie’s book in 1481; this ritual was observed some



Figure 8: A Qalandar dervish called “derviche mandiant” (begging dervish): photograph, end of the 19th century, private collection Pierre de Gigord, Paris (I would like here to thank Mr de Gigord for having authorized me to reproduce this picture).

26 “Derviches tourneurs,” *Magasin pittoresque* (1839): pp. 71.

27 About these rituals see Eve Feuillebois, Alberto Ambrosio and Thierry Zarcone, *Les Derviches tourneurs. Histoire, doctrines et pratiques* (Paris: Le Cerf - Patrimoines, 2006); Sâfi Arpağuş, *Mevlevîkte Ma'nevî Eğitimi* (Istanbul: Vefa Y., 2009).

decades before at Edirne or in Anatolia.²⁸ Besides this, the first picture of a Mevlevi dervish was made by the engravers Cl. Duflos (1665–1727), and published in the *Histoire de l'état présent de l'Empire Ottoman* of P. Rycaut in 1671 in Paris. This Mevlevi dervish however doesn't dance but only plays the flute and the tambourine. Therefore, the first representation of the ritual of the dance was painted in 1654 by an Austrian painter whose name is not clear: it could have been Franz Hermann, Hans Gemminger or Valentin Mueller (Figure 9).²⁹ The second and best known representation of this dance is that of Jean-Baptiste van Mour, official painter to the French King in the Levant, who lived and died in Istanbul in 1699. This painting was published in 1712, in Paris, in the *Recueil de cent estampes représentant différentes nations du Levant*, and became soon the model for all the engravings and paintings of this dance in the future (Figure 10).³⁰ In this image, the dervishes are performing the circular dance with one arm pointing to the sky, while the other is inclined to the earth, a very symbolic gesture. The ceremonial hall is generally that of the Pera *mevlevihane*.³¹



Figure 9: Dance of the whirling dervishes, painting by Franz Hermann, or Hans Gemminger or Valentin Mueller, 1654; from *Images of the Turks in the 17th Century Europe* (Istanbul: SSM, 2005), p. 131.



Figure 10: « La Danse des dervis » : de Jean-Baptiste van Mour, Istanbul, end of the 17th century; from *Recueil de cent estampes représentant différentes nations du Levant* (Paris: 1712).

There are few differences between van Mour's painting and the other paintings of the dance ritual in the Pera lodge made in the 18th and especially in the 19th century. The sole

28 Georges de Hongrie, *Des Turcs*, p. 120.

29 Reproduced in *Images of the Turks in the 17th Century Europe* (Istanbul: SSM, 2005), p. 131.

30 This painting is now displayed in the Museum of Amsterdam.

31 About van Mour see A. Boppe, *Les Peintres du Bosphore au XVIIIe siècle* (on his engravings of the dervishes, pp. 24–25) and Seth Gopin and Eveline Sint Nicolaas, *Jean-Baptiste Vanmour, peintre de la Sublime Porte 1671–1737*, Valenciennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Valenciennes, 2009, p. 86 (some paintings of Vanmour on Mevlevism, less known, are presented in this book).

changes are: first, the appearance of a musical band; and second, the presence of foreign visitors in the audience. Westerners were usually welcomed at the ceremonial of the Pera lodge, since the end of the 18th century, through payment of some fees.³² The great number of articles in European magazines, newspapers, and chapters in travelogues, etc. dedicated to the whirling and howling dervishes is astonishing. Besides, several famous writers and artists, when visiting Istanbul, have written some paragraphs about the rituals observed in these two lodges; let us mention here Théophile Gauthier, Gérard de Nerval, and Christian Andersen.³³ Furthermore, the photographers and the postcard makers have immortalized the whirling dervishes and their dances, and even the lodge of Pera (Figure 11).

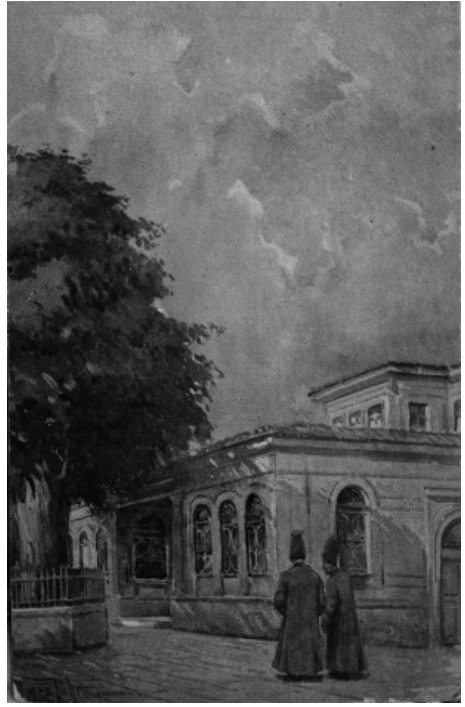


Figure 11: Postcard of the Mevlevi lodge of Pera, first quarter of the 20th century; private collection Th. Zarcone.

After the ban upon the Sufi brotherhoods in 1925, the Mevlevi and Rifai orders ceased their activities. It was only in the 50's that the dances of the whirling dervishes were restarted, first at Konya and then at the Pera *mevlevihane* (transformed into a museum), but as a folkloric performance only, and very recently as a folkloric attraction for a foreign audience.

The howling dervishes

The second attraction in Constantinople after the dance of the whirling dervishes, was the Sufi ritual on Thursday afternoon at the lodge of the howling dervishes (Rifai) at Üsküdar, on the Bosphorus. The first travel guide in Turkey, that is the *Handbook for travellers in Turkey*, published in 1854 by the English printer John Murray, reports that a great number of people were coming to this lodge.³⁴ This Rifai tekke, founded in 1732, is mentioned in 1784 in a Western source, probably for the first time, by the well know Polish traveller M. Potoski. The later however didn't depict these dervishes as "howling dervishes," but he described with details the ritual of the "hot iron hooks" held by the dervishes in their mouths until they were

³² It was also the case of the lodge of the howling dervishes of Üsküdar; see J. Griffiths, *Nouveau Voyage dans la Turquie d'Europe et d'Asie et en Arabie* (Paris: 1812), vol. 1, p. 104.

³³ Théophile Gauthier, *Constantinople* (Paris: M. Levy Frères, 1856), p. 143 ; Hans Christian Andersen, *A Poet's Bazaar* (London: R. Bentley, 1846), vol. 3

³⁴ *Handbook for travellers in Turkey describing Constantinople, European Turkey, Asia Minor, Armenia, and Mesopotamia*, London, Murray, 1854, pp. 119–20.

cold.³⁵ At this time, Potoski didn't mention the ritual of "walking over the backs of disciples" (*devse/dawsa*) that would be so attractive to the travellers and the tourists in the 19th and 20th centuries, and draw hundred of foreigners to the place. It seems as if this ritual was introduced later in the lodge, perhaps by the middle of the 19th century.³⁶

However, as mentioned in the beginning of this article, if Westerners used to attend the ritual of the whirling dervishes because of its beauty and esthetic, they were on the contrary drawn to the ceremonial of the howling dervishes because of its frightening and terrific aspect. No wonder some Europeans visitors, ladies especially, avoided attending this ritual. There were also some foreigners who wrote in strong criticism of it.³⁷

The ceremony of the Rifai or howling dervishes was composed of two main rituals which were accompanied with prayers and rough *dhikr*, the later being depicted as "howls" by the foreigners. The first ritual, that of the dervishes piercing their sides, bodies, and faces, has been portrayed by a local artist from the circle of Kapıdağı in 18th century (in d'Ohsson's book) (Figure 12).³⁸ Besides this, we do know detailed descriptions of this practice from some travelogues.³⁹ The aim of this ritual was "the proof" (*burhan göstermek*), i.e. to demonstrate that the power of God is so great as to protect the dervishes and allow such wonders.



Figure 12: "Exercices des derwischs rufayis" (ritual of the Rifai dervishes); from Baron Ignatius Muradgée d'Ohsson, *Tableau général de l'Empire ottoman*, vol. 2, plate 132, facing p. 303.

The second ritual is more impressive than the first one, and this is certainly the reason why it has been painted by at least two well known Western artists of the French and Italian orientalist schools. In this ritual, the shaykh of the *tekke* was "walking over the backs" of his disciples or their children (*devse/dawsa*). These children were lying down in quick

35 Potocki, *Voyages en Turquie et en Egypte faits en l'année 1784* (Varsovie - Paris: Royez, 1788), pp. 73–77. Potocki, like the other travellers, first attended the lodge of the whirling dervishes of Pera.

36 Guillaume Antoine Olivier, *Voyage dans l'Empire Othoman, l'Egypte et la Perse, fait par ordre du gouvernement pendant les six premières années de la République* (Paris: chez H. Agasse, an 9 [1801]), vol. 1, pp. 80–88.

37 See for example Selim Sırrı, *Doğru Sözlər* (Istanbul: Tefeyyüz Kitabhanesi), 1914, pp. 48, and Baronne Durand de Fontmagne, *Un séjour à l'ambassade de France sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Plon, 1902), pp. 125, 275.

38 G. Renda, "Illustrating the Tableau Général de l'Empire Othoman," p. 72.

39 See Charles Mac-Farlane, *Constantinople et la Turquie en 1828 et 1829*, translated from the English (Paris: Moutardier, 1830), p. 155.

succession like a living carpet, as is well illustrated in the paintings. The ritual was supposed to bring happiness and health to the people upon whom the shaykh was walking. The first visual representations of this ceremony — drawings — were published in two English magazines: *The Graphic. Illustrated Weekly Newspaper*, in 1876 (Figure 13);⁴⁰ the second in an unidentified magazine in 1880. In the first drawing, entitled



Figure 13: Howling dervishes at Scutari, from an unidentified magazine, 1880; private collection Th. Zarcone.

“The Eastern Question: howling dervishes at Scutari. From a sketch by our special artist at Constantinople,” the shaykh is walking over the backs of some children. In the second drawing, named “The howling dervishes of Scutari healing the sick,” which seems to be made by the same artist, the shaykh walks on the back of one child only.

Besides these, two monumental oil paintings of this ceremony were made by two famous orientalist painters. The first one by the French Albert Aublet (1851–1938) who visited Istanbul in 1881, was shown at the “Exhibition of Orientalist Paintings,” in Paris, one year later.⁴¹ It is entitled “The Imam walks over the back of children to bring them under the protection of God” (*L’Imam marche sur les enfants pour les mettre sous la protection d’Allah*). This painting is very realistic and one can notice many Sufi elements and decorations, musical instruments, swords, etc. and especially the calligraphy on the walls of the lodge (Figure 14). The second painting was authored by the Italian painter Fausto Zonaro (1854–1929), the official painter of the Sultan. It is a large oil painting of two by one meters which was particularly praised at the Milano Exposition in 1906. The painting was reproduced in black and white



Figure 14: Albert Aublet’s oil painting, end of the 19th century.

⁴⁰ Vol. XIII: n°334 (April 22 1876).

⁴¹ Published in the French journal *Magasin pittoresque* in 1883. See Lynne Thornton, *Les Orientalistes, peintres voyageurs* (Paris: ACR Editions, 2001), pp. 17–18 and Ed. Ch., “Les Derviches hurleurs,” *Magasin pittoresque* (1883), pp. 41–2.

in the French magazine *Le Figaro illustré* in February 1907.⁴² The painting was probably completed by Zonaro around 1900. In his memoirs, Zonaro writes that he had attended the ritual of the howling dervishes several times when working on his painting (Figure 15). There are, however, several differences between Aublet and Zonaro's paintings. Zonaro, for example, has painted foreign visitors watching the ceremony, and he has even painted himself, his wife and his daughter howling together with the dervishes.⁴³ Zonaro's painting, notwithstanding its artistic quality, is an "orientalist catch-all" painting, since the painter brought in many elements linked to Sufism: the ritual of walking over the backs of disciples, the alignment of the howling dervishes and also a whirling dervish playing the flute. All these elements and people gathering at the same moment seems unlikely. This painting may be compared here with the "Whirling Dervishes" (of Cairo) of the French Jean-Léon Gérôme (1829–1904) that is also not very realistic.⁴⁴



Figure 15: Fausto Zonaro's oil painting, around 1900.

This is the reason why Zonaro is more interesting for the esthetic elements (headgear, faces of people, etc.) than — as it is the case in d'Aubet's painting — for the ethnographic elements, i.e. the ritualistic artifacts, the calligraphy, the symbolic and ritualistic gestures. D'Aubet's painting has definitively a better quality for the historians and the anthropologists than Zonaro's. It must be depicted as an "ethnographic painting" and considered a "source" for researchers.

42 Adolphe Thalasso, "Fausto Zonaro, peintre de S.M.I. le Sultan," *Figaro illustré* vol. 18:n° 203 (February 1907): pp. 22–33. This painting was erroneously dated 1910 when it was sold in 2000 by Christies at London (the expert has based his evaluation on the mention "Zonaro 1910" written on the painting). Yet, the painting had already been completed in 1907 when the article in the *Figaro illustré* came out.

43 See a detailed analysis of these two paintings in my article "Batı seyyahları Gözlerinde İstanbul'daki 'Haykırın Dervişler' Töreni" (The ritual of the howling dervishes of Istanbul as seen by Western travellers) *İstanbul Araştırmaları Yıllığı* 1 (September 2012).

44 See Gérôme's painting in Kristian Davies, *The Orientalists. Western Artists in Arabia, the Sahara, Persia and India* (New York: Laynfaroh, 2005), pp. 286–289.

To conclude, the European readers who had read a lot about the whirling and howling dervishes in magazines and seen paintings, pictures and photographs of them, eventually wanted to have these dervishes come to the West, and such an event was arranged in France, in 1899, at the time of the zoological and ethnographical exhibition at the Jardin d'acclimation, in Paris. At this exhibition, intriguing peoples, primitive tribes and curious animals from all around the world were shown, and among them, a “pavilion of the dervishes,” with about twenty Sufis. This pavilion was named in French “Théâtre des derviches” (Theater of the dervishes). Several postcards were published to commemorate this exhibition, and some of them were dedicated to the “Théâtre des derviches.”

This “Théâtre” resembles, however, a circus or fairground attraction, and the dervishes, originally from Cairo, are exposed as curious animals. In the postcards, we can recognize the Mevlevi dervishes with their long hats and wide skirts, and the Rufai dervishes with their iron sticks in their hands (Figure 16). The rituals performed by these “dervishes in the Forest of Boulogne” « derviches du bois de Boulogne » were observed by a writer who published a report in a popular French magazine.⁴⁵



Figure 16: Postcard “Jardin d’acclimation. L’Afrique mystérieuse. Théâtre des derviches”; private collection Th. Zarcone.

Conclusion

As it has been show, the visual representations of dervishes in Europe since the 16th century are rich and varied. The figure of the dervish has obviously inspired the travel literature, as well as the novels and poetry of the time, and it has also marked the emergence of painting and photography in the East. The explanation lies in the exotic, amazing, wonderful and frightening character of the figure of the dervish. The theme of the dervish became at that time both a literary theme in Europe, and an iconic feature of the “Oriental trip.” Since I am not an art historian, I am not interested in the estheticism of these images of the dervishes. My main aim was to decipher the intention of the artists and to see how they have tried to

⁴⁵ Paul Mégnin, “Les Derviches tourneurs et hurleurs au Jardin d’Acclimation,” *Revue des sciences et de leurs applications aux arts et à l’industrie* 1356 (May 20 1899): pp. 396–397. This article is illustrated with 3 drawings: a whirling dervish, a dance of fire and a dance of the sabres performed by two dervishes-warriors (pp. 395–398).

comply with their public's expectations, and whether they have painted reliable or unreliable representations. Another important conclusion is that the Western representations of the dervishes — which are different, in several aspects, from those made by the Eastern artists and miniaturists — is of the greatest interest for the historians and the anthropologists of religion in general and of Sufism in particular, because such visual sources bring a complementary approach to the written Eastern sources, and throw light on some topics neglected by the Eastern artists. So it is not an exaggeration to confirm, as mentioned above, that some of these visual representations of the dervishes must be regarded as ethnographic sources. Some other visual sources are, on the contrary, unreliable “orientalist” compositions. On the other hand, the visual representations are a visual way to narrate to a Western audience the impressions experienced by the travellers when meeting, talking and observing the dervishes.